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Agenda item 10
Consideration and adoption of the report of the Committee to the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session

Draft report
Chapter III
General debate

Rapporteur: Chibaula David **Silwamba** (Zambia)

1. Statements in the general debate were made by the following Member States: Argentina, Belarus, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Chile, China, the Congo, Costa Rica, Cuba (in its national capacity and subsequently on behalf of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States), Egypt, Fiji (on behalf of the Group of 77 and China), Guatemala, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Israel, Japan, Lebanon, Mexico, Oman, Pakistan, the Russian Federation, Senegal, South Africa, Ukraine, the United States of America, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) and Zambia. A representative of the European Union addressed the Committee on behalf of the members and associate members of the Union. The International Organization of la Francophonie, the State of Palestine and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization addressed the meeting in their capacity as observers.

2. The general debate was preceded by statements made by the outgoing Chair of the Committee and the newly elected Chair. The Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information also made a statement and responded to questions and comments by Member States.

3. In taking up the substantive questions before the Committee, speakers emphasized the central role of the United Nations in global affairs and of the Department of Public Information as its public voice. One speaker, addressing the Committee on behalf of a large group, said that that group supported the Department in promoting and advancing the work of the Organization through its campaigns on issues of importance to the international community, including the implementation of the internationally agreed development goals and other issues on the United Nations agenda. The speaker expressed support for the Department's special

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information programme on the question of Palestine and the role and work of the network of United Nations information centres.

4. Another speaker, saying that the voice of the United Nations must be heard clearly by all, stressed that the Department's efforts would help to broaden global support for the United Nations and enhance the latter's credibility. Another speaker encouraged the Department to continue communications strategies that addressed issues concerning peace, security, human rights and development. The greater exchange of information between the Secretariat and other United Nations entities, in addition to civil society, contributed greatly to implementing those key United Nations priorities, he added. In that context, a number of speakers argued in favour of closer collaboration between the Department and the Committee. One suggested that the Committee should catalyse knowledge to adequately inform the public and to stimulate lively discourse and social debate.

5. Many speakers welcomed the Department's growing use of new information and communications technologies. One, representing a large group, said that new information technologies had created many new possibilities for human communication. Agreeing on the need to capitalize on such opportunities, he said that expanding the use of mobile and Internet platforms promoted the messages and activities of the United Nations in real time. He cautioned, however, that, while developing web platforms was useful, the increasing digital gap between developed and developing countries remained a matter of concern. In most developing countries, traditional media, such as radio, television and the written press, remained a major source of information. Accordingly, efforts must be made to strengthen traditional media. Another speaker advocated encouraging access to information through traditional media in as many languages as possible, along with the introduction of new technologies in developing countries. Another, while acknowledging the value of developing new technologies, noted that the digital divide between developed and developing countries was too wide. Owing to lack of access by many countries to new technologies, traditional media, such as United Nations television and United Nations radio, must be maintained.

6. Several speakers stressed their support for the promotion of freedom of the press. One, representing a large group, recalled that too many journalists worldwide continued to be censored, jailed, kidnapped or killed. Citing data from the Committee to Protect Journalists, she said that 979 journalists had been killed since 1992, including 14 in 2012 alone, and that the international community must continue working together to end such tragic human rights violations.

7. One speaker observed that it was regrettable that certain developed countries, by taking advantage of their monopoly over modern communications technology, were continuously seeking to distort facts and news and engineer events and developments, especially those relating to developing countries. He reported that certain Western countries had imposed a ban on the broadcast of more than 20 satellite television and radio channels of his country. Another speaker also denounced what she described as flagrant aggression in the form of illegal radio and television broadcasts to her country.

8. The issue of multilingualism in the work of the Department was stressed by most speakers. One, on behalf of a large group, said that multilingualism was at the core of global communications. Another speaker said that linguistic diversity was a universal value and that he had high expectations for the implementation of

multilingualism at the United Nations. Agreeing that it was important to promote multilingualism, one speaker voiced support for innovative technology, social media tools and partnerships with civil society, businesses and other relevant groups to produce and distribute information in an environmentally friendly, cost-neutral way. Another speaker, proposing ways to improve the Department's work, pointed first to the need to develop the level of services in all working languages in a balanced manner.

9. Several speakers voiced their disappointment at the slow progress in achieving linguistic parity in the work of the Department, especially on its website. A number of speakers returned to the issue of having the Department's press releases available in the six official languages of the United Nations. One, representing a large group, welcomed the Department's pilot initiative to translate press releases into Spanish for the session of the Commission on Population and Development currently under way. She reiterated her group's suggestion, however, that a strategy should be designed and implemented to provide press releases in all official languages in order to achieve full parity, at least for website content. Another speaker, voicing his disappointment at the lack of parity among the official languages of the Organization, proposed that the current unfair situation could be overcome by sharing the limited financial resources through a rotating scheme of languages. Such a scheme should be determined on the basis of the statistics held by the Department and those contained in the reports of the Secretary-General.

10. Another speaker, while commending the Department for its pilot project to issue press releases in Spanish, called it a first step to making them available in all official languages. He called for prompt implementation of the mandate within existing resources, beginning with the publication of press releases in all the official languages at regular intervals and during predetermined time frames. During the initial stage, languages could be rotated. Alternatively, he suggested, the editorial criteria, length and frequency of press releases could be modified to make room for new teams to write press releases in the other official languages. Another speaker, noting that press releases were sometimes excessively long and contained extensive background information, argued that modifying their structure would enable their issuance in other languages.

11. The role and work of the network of United Nations information centres was addressed by most speakers. Speaking on behalf of a group, one speaker recalled that the group attached great importance to that role and work, stressing that any decision pertaining to reorganizing the centres must be made in close consultation with the host countries and take into account the geographical, linguistic and technological characteristics and needs of different regions. The group welcomed the offer by some developing countries to host information centres at rent-free premises, while noting that such support was no substitute for the full allocation of financial resources. She also reiterated her group's support for taking the measures necessary to establish an information centre in Luanda to serve the needs of Portuguese-speaking African countries.

12. Another speaker, also representing a large group, expressed her satisfaction at the growing use of social media by the information centres. Referring to statistics that revealed that the 63 centres received 10 million online visitors in 2012, thanks to the availability of information in local languages and the six official languages of the United Nations, she said that such figures only underscored the very real impact

that the Department's message could have on longer-term campaigns, such as human rights and climate change, in addition to hotspot issues such as the crises in Mali and the Syrian Arab Republic.

13. The Department's special information programme on the question of Palestine was discussed by several speakers. One encouraged the Department to continue efforts to inform the world about the harsh plight of Palestinians living under occupation and to reveal the violations against them. Another expressed support for the Department's partnership with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees towards a just, comprehensive peace in the Middle East. A third expressed the hope that the special information programme would receive sufficient funding and staff to fully implement its mandate.

14. Several speakers lauded the Department for its outreach activities, in particular its work with civil society and academic institutions. One commended the Department's creativity and thoughtfulness in commemorating the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Another commended the Department for its observance of World Autism Awareness Day and the International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust. The Department's United Nations Academic Impact initiative, providing a platform for schools of higher learning and research to work with the United Nations and with one another on common goals and objectives, was also positively singled out by several speakers. The appointment by the Secretary-General of an envoy for youth was also welcomed by several speakers.

15. Speakers, while expressing appreciation for the wide range of activities carried out by the Department, recognized the growing challenges faced. One proposed a three-step approach to handling such challenges. First, all States should be up to date in making contributions. Second, expectations and mandates should be realistic and, third, reform and partnerships must be implemented efficiently.

16. In his closing remarks, the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information assured Member States of continued partnership with them through the Committee and its Bureau, seeking their guidance on the way forward.